

Dead Letters: Creative Crypto

What lurks in the woods? In the deepest jungles? In the murky depths? For centuries, humans have had stories about mysterious—and often dangerous—beasts. The Loch Ness Monster, Chupacabra, the Mongolian Death Worm. We're so fascinated we have a whole branch of science devoted to proving whether or not these creatures really exist.

In the world of fiction, of course, there's no need to look for proof: these creatures do exist, and in the hands of writers their adventures not only provide a good shudder, they comment on the human condition.

Take, for example, the just-over-flash piece "Eight Simple Rules for Dating my Teenage Chupacabra", by Steve G over at [Cryptozoology.com](http://www.cryptozoology.com). Steve's list of rules for dating his daughter—the Chupacabra of the title—is a comedy rather than a chiller, but it's really about personal and peer rejection. We feel bad for Chupie because she doesn't fit in no matter how hard she tries. She's that awkward teen we all used to be.

Going a shade darker, there's Neil Ayres' "Bury Him in the Rose Garden" over at the Three-Lobed Burning Eye, an e-zine that's been publishing top-notch creepfest fiction for years now. Ayres weaves a finely-motifed, heart-breaking tale about a creature born of sin—but the tale speaks volumes about our concepts of morality, beauty, and the cruelty of the world.

Tony Early's "The Cryptozoologist", available in The New Yorker's archives at www.newyorker.com, is about a woman who's being haunted by something eating the apples on her isolated orchard property. But she's tortured by memories of her strange marriage, her deceased husband, and her sad and lonely life. It's really all about what's eating her—until she reaches out to make peace with—well, I won't spoil it.

Perhaps our fascination with the existence of such creatures stems from the fascination with finding the undiscovered parts of ourselves—because if we look hard enough, we can always find something ugly, something that frightens us. Renegade jealousy, blind rage, immoral tendencies. We may be terrified of what's lurking in the woods beyond our yards, but if you ask me? We would do well to worry more about the reflections in our own mirrors.

"Eight Rules for Dating my Teenage Chupacabra" by Steve G.
http://www.cryptozoology.com/cryptofiction/cryptofiction_show.php?id=28

"Bury Him in the Rose Garden" by Neil Ayres
http://www.owlsoup.com/3LBE/issue16/3lbe16_story5.html

"The Cryptozoologist" by Tony Early
http://www.newyorker.com/archive/2006/01/09/060109fi_fiction